



**This newsletter has been designed to enable you to get an idea of what kind of experience you will have should you join us on one of our cruises.**

**Sun 1 May | A slack dive** This morning, after a big session last night, Mark managed to get six divers in the water! They dived the "Hispania" on slack water for the second year in a row and some of the more sarcastic members of the group congratulated Mark on his notable achievement. (It is fair to say he has dropped divers on the "Hispania" in conditions other than slack water on a number of occasions in the past!!!) For his part, Mark was proud to have roused half the party this morning and got them in the sea. After the dive the boat returned to Tobermory and was able to get a berth on the pontoon this time.

The guys opted for a walk round Aros Park and some afternoon drinking rather than a second dive today. They returned to the boat for a splendid homemade (boatmade?) curry aboard before trooping off into town again to enjoy more music.

**Mon 2 May | Boast of best boat** A very early start for the guests and crew today, enabling the divers to get on the wreck of the "Breda" in Ardmucknish Bay near Oban. After brunch alongside we bade them farewell for another year. Mick, the organiser, emailed pretty much as soon as he got home saying:

*"We had the best weekend ever this weekend, they're all brill but this was special. Great crew: Mark, Marky Mark and Kirsty did us proud again. :-D Everything was top notch, food, service, the boat. We all boast that when we go away we have the best boat on the West Coast of Scotland and to be fair it is."*

They have already rebooked for next year's Music Festival so there can't be any better recommendation than that. Thanks guys. Below: Biddulph SAC with Kirsty and Marky Mark, on the pier in Oban, as the group returned home, by Mark Henrys



**Sat 7 May | Raven rags garish goldie** Hjalmar Bjorge departed Oban with 11 guests aboard this afternoon. The boat went south cruising down the Sound of Kerrera and then over to Loch Spelve. At the loch entrance everyone saw an adult golden eagle on a perch

beside its nest and also a very striking first year juvenile golden eagle with vivid white markings, the latter being mobbed by ravens. The boat anchored for the night opposite the Inverlussa mussel farm (avoiding the annual muster of the Clyde Cruising Club) and everyone watched an otter feeding whilst they fed themselves with a 3-course dinner.

**Sun 8 May | Otters 'n' eggs** Mark moved the boat across the loch this morning and anchored off Croggan. Guests went ashore for a walk until lunchtime. Mark walked Ship's Dog along toward the fish farm, spotting an otter working his way along the shore. Returning to pick up the guests they met Cathy who gave them some lovely fresh eggs from her brood. After lunch a sedate cruise was taken up the Sound of Mull in a strengthening southerly breeze. Hjalmar Bjorge headed into Loch Sunart and Loch Drumbuie for the night. Above



right: Yes, that's a waterfall blowing sideways in the Sound of Mull and (below) Duart Castle under grey skies in the Sound of Mull, all photos by Ken Lawson



**Mon 9 May | Auliston to Aros** The wind blew up overnight, to a south easterly gale force, but the boat was well sheltered. After breakfast the guests went ashore, with most walking out to Auliston Point, which affords great views of the Sound and of the island of Mull itself. Below: scene stealing Heilan' Coos near Loch Drumbuie by Bob Kitchen



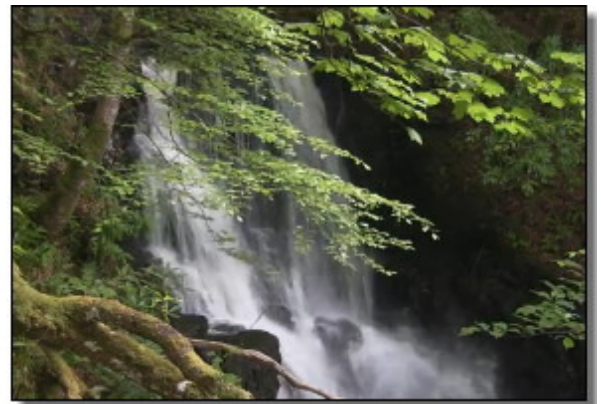
Whilst the guests were ashore Mark took the tender and went to say hello to our old friends Norman and Gillian aboard their yacht "Curlew". They were sharing the anchorage with Hjalmar Bjorge. This is their fifth season on "Curlew" following over 30 years aboard their previous vessel "Barcadale". Experienced sailors indeed.



Guests returned for lunch aboard, all having enjoyed their respective walks.

After lunch Mark and the crew upped anchor and went across to Tobermory, berthing on the pontoons. Above: Tobermory and the harbour  
by Ken Lawson

Most of the guests set off for another good walk to Aros Park and the waterfall. Hjalmar Borge remained in Tobermory overnight. Mark heard from Rob, aboard Elizabeth G, who was experiencing 40 knot winds in Loch Bracadale on Skye. Right: A waterfall behaving more normally in Aros Park by Ken Lawson



**Tue 10 May | Batten down the hatches!**

Definitely a case of "batten down the hatches" this morning as Hjalmar Borge left Tobermory for a short but rather lively cruise round the north of Mull past Caliach Point, around the Burg Peninsula and into the shelter of Loch Tuath. The boat anchored in Soriby Bay and after lunch the guests went ashore for a walk during which otters and a golden eagle were seen. The forecast was not improving so the vessel stayed put for the night.

**Wed 11 May | Bounteous birds** Winds were close to gale force this morning when Hjalmar Borge cruised, through a large swell, over to the Treshnish Isles and Lunga. Running across the anchorage at Lunga it quickly became clear that a landing was going to be dangerous. Plan B was considered whilst everyone got good sightings of puffins, razorbills and rafts of Manx shearwaters who were obviously enjoying the blustery conditions. Below (left) a black guillemot and (right) an oystercatcher, both by Bob Kitchen



Plan B morphed into a cruise to Inch Kenneth, close by in Loch na Keal. This tiny island's most famous owners were the Mitford family. Sold by them in the late 1960s it remains privately owned. Hjalmar Bjarke anchored for lunch in the bay where sea conditions were not great. A leisurely lunch was taken after which the crew ran the guests ashore, opting for a sheltered beach landing, rather than the jetty that Mark normally employs. Whilst the first party of guests was being ferried ashore an adult golden eagle flew directly over the boat which gave those remaining aboard an amazing view. The guests all had a fabulous afternoon ashore in bright sunshine with a stiff breeze. After everyone returned, Mark and the crew upped anchor and crossed to Cragard Bay, Ulva for an overnight stop. Below (top left) "The big house" on Inch Kenneth (top right) looking across to the Burg Peninsula on Mull from Inch Kenneth, both photos by Ken Lawson (bottom left) the chapel on Inch Kenneth and (bottom right) ruin on Ulva, both photos by Bob Kitchen



**Thu 12 May | Fingal's Cave, fossils 'n' Fatty** Guests sat watching three otters this morning while breakfast was being prepared. They were feeding on fish whilst being simultaneously mobbed by gulls for being so close to their nests. After breakfast Hjalmar Bjarke cruised past Staffa in a fairly large swell, pausing for a close look at Fingal's Cave, which always looks far more dramatic when there are big waves crashing into it. The choice here was to continue south round the island or return to the north. The more comfortable option, north, was voted for, and the boat returned past the Treshnish Isles before making for the Sound of Mull once more. Again, big flocks of shearwaters and terns were seen feeding, a fantastic sight.

Lunch was taken, on anchor, off Aros Castle in the Sound before the boat entered Loch Aline. Guests disembarked in the south eastern corner and walked out past the fossil cliff and on to Ardtornish Point. They continued to the bay south of the Point where they were collected again aboard Hjalmar Bjarke, the boat having steamed back out of the loch, to wait on anchor for the walkers.

Ship's Dog (aka Fatty) was taken in turn by most of the guests during the walk. Everyone seemed to like her very much with Patty muttering something about kidnapping her and taking her back to America!

**Fri 13 May | Last day of first week long cruise** The overnight anchorage was calm so all aboard were well rested prior to the final cruise into Oban today. After brunch onboard Mark and the crew bade farewell to our first week-long cruise guests of the year. Almost everyone agreed the visit to Inch Kenneth had been the highlight of a cruise delivered in some difficult weather conditions. Below (left) seals on the rocks at Inch Kenneth and (right) Spring is sprung on Inch Kenneth, both by Bob Kitchen



No more news from today which, given the date, is perhaps just as well! A week off now for the crew before the boat is out again on a private whole boat charter.

**Wed 18 May | 2012 dates online** Just uploaded, dates and details of our cruises next year for those of you who like to get your holidays organised well in advance. Previous guests will be familiar with most of the itineraries and, as usual, will receive a 5% discount on the price of their booking. See the cruise dates page for details.

**Fri 20 May | Pilot whale strandings** Various online news pages today have reported on a group of around 100 pilot whales which are in danger of stranding in Loch Carnan on South Uist in the Outer Hebrides. Alasdair Jack, who is at the scene with members of the British Divers Marine Life Rescue, said it appears that at least 20 of the whales have quite serious head injuries which will cause them to strand. Dave Jarvis, also with the rescue team, said pilot whales were sociable creatures and unfortunately healthy mammals may beach alongside individuals who are dying.

**Sat 21 May | All aboard (including alcohol)** Full boat private charter party Trish and fellow travellers boarded Hjalmar Bjorge on the North Pier in Oban this afternoon. Departure was slightly delayed whilst the crew loaded and stowed the guests' inordinately large supply of alcohol!!! The vessel eventually pulled off the pier and the first evening was spent on the mooring at Tobermory.

**Sun 22 May | North to Nevis** Hjalmar Bjorge left Tobermory this morning with a truly dreadful forecast ringing in Mark's ears. The inshore forecast for tomorrow morning was giving Violent Storm 11 so he decided to head for the shelter of Loch Nevis and the Knoydart peninsula. After a surprisingly pleasant run the boat anchored at Glaschoille in the north west corner of Loch Nevis. Lunch was taken aboard and thereafter guests went ashore for a walk toward Inverie and possibly The Old Forge, mainland Britain's remotest pub.

**Mon 23 May | 100 mph gusts across Scotland** As forecast yesterday, the weather had started to deteriorate early this morning so Mark and the crew (Anna and Marky Mark) upped the anchor at 0515 and headed north to seek better shelter. The boat was anchored for breakfast at Glenelg and Mark considered putting guests ashore for a quick walk. However by 0900 the wind had veered and was now blowing a full gale so that plan was abandoned. Heading further north through the flood tides of the Kyles of Lochalsh narrows, Hjalmar Bjorge reached a record speed of 14.7 knots! Very exciting! Shortly after this speedy passage the hook was dropped in Loch na Beiste off Lochalsh.

The remainder of the day was spent aboard, watching the fierce gusts swooping down off the nearby hills. The choice of anchorage proved to be a good one and the boat hardly moved. This evening everyone celebrated Trish's birthday with champagne that had been brought aboard and Marky Mark cooked a splendid meal incorporating sirloin steaks that Trish had brought with her. The atmosphere inside was cheerful and light while outside, calamity ruled.

Gusts reached over 100mph during the night. The photo right, which was taken by Jamie Riley and appeared on the BBC News website, shows a yacht washed ashore at Fort William, where gusts were recorded in excess of 100mph.



Online reports about the pilot whales (that we wrote about on Friday) suggest two have died inside Loch Carnan but the rest of the group seem to have departed the loch. At the end of October 2010 another group of pilot whales almost came to grief in this same loch. They also left but later in the same week 33 pilot whales were found dead, on a beach in County Donegal, thought to be from the same group. Let's hope this group fares better.

**Tue 24 May | Lunch on dry land** Still very breezy this morning but that didn't stop a couple of nearby otters entertaining the guests. Mark also discovered a light coating of volcanic ash had settled on the boat overnight. Guest (and ex neighbour of Mark and Hannah's on Mull) Jim Corbett heard news of several trees being blown over in Lochbuie and seemingly many areas throughout Scotland were now without power due to the high winds. In Oban bay at least five yachts were blown off their moorings.

After a very leisurely breakfast the crew upped anchor in rather better conditions and set off for Portree on the east coast of Skye. Hjalmar Bjorge anchored there just before lunch. En route the guests decided they'd like to take lunch ashore so off they strolled, taking Marky Mark with them while Mark and Anna maintained anchor watch. Guests and cook returned in jovial mood and the boat departed Portree, heading north to Staffin Bay. At this point the weather was reasonable and Mark thought there was a slim possibility of heading out to Kilda in the morning.

**Wed 25 May | First minke of the year!** Unfortunately this morning's dismal forecast put any thoughts of St Kilda out of everyone's minds. The boat departed Staffin Bay, arriving at Isay in Loch Dunvegan, for lunch on anchor. The forecast was panning out as promised, with torrential rain and a strengthening south easterly wind. After lunch the vessel headed toward Loch Bracadale. Rounding Neist Point the first sighting of the season of a minke whale, albeit briefly. With a 5 metre swell and near gale force winds none of the guests were keen on hanging around for a better view! Hjalmar Bjorge finally dropped anchor at Carbost in Loch Harport with the anticipation of a fairly quiet night.

**Thu 26 May | All day at Canna** Mark and the crew were up early this morning, ready to leave Carbost ahead of the next weather system coming in. The vessel arrived at Canna at 1045 and guests were very happy to jump ship and spend the rest of the day ashore, walking, exploring and relaxing.

**Fri 27 May | Rum, my deer?** A quick hop from Canna to Rum today where guests spent the day ashore, some visiting Kinloch Castle and others exploring further inland. The wind in the anchorage was again gusting gale force. Mark collected the guests in the late afternoon and was pleasantly surprised to bump into Dr Jo Pemberton who we know well from our days of ferrying the NTS work parties back and forth to St Kilda. Jo is currently involved in deer management on Rum and knew guests Jim and Patience from her days on the Deer Commission. She also said, unsurprisingly, that the current St Kilda work party had been stranded on Hirta for some time due to the adverse weather conditions.

**Sat 28 May | "A bit of a sea"** Hjalmar Bjorge left Rum at 0930 this morning and a quick dash was made for Eigg where the boat anchored and guests were taken ashore in fairly strong winds. They returned to the boat shortly before lunch in even stronger winds. After lunch the boat and its passengers endured a very lively run past Ardnamurchan Point in what Mark euphemistically referred to as "a bit of a sea". Happily nobody saw their lunch for a second time that day! The vessel anchored in Loch Drumbuie for a final night with guests disembarking in Oban tomorrow. Jim and Patience return to Lochbuie on Mull, their permanent home, with their friends and relations returning south of the border.

**Mon 30 May | HBj sets sail with two skippers** Last week's guests waved good-bye to Hjalmar Bjorge and the crew in Oban yesterday. An overnight turnaround with another week long private charter party joining the boat today. They were welcomed onboard by skipper Mark, cook Marky Mark, crew Kirsty and Tim, who skippered yacht Zuza for us a couple of years ago. He'll be having a shot of Hjalmar Bjorge this week. Once everyone was aboard, and the safety briefing delivered, the vessel headed north up the Sound of Mull, into Loch Sunart and Loch Drumbuie for the first night of the cruise. It was a beautiful still evening in the anchorage.

**Tue 31 May | Sperm whale dies on Redcar beach** A lost and disorientated sperm whale, measuring 44 feet in length and weighing 20 tons, beached itself at Redcar early this morning. British Divers Marine Life Rescue, firefighters and volunteers all tried in vain to save the whale but it was pronounced dead shortly after 9am. A spokesman for BDMLR said the North Sea was absolutely the wrong environment for such a creature due to lack of suitable food and refloating would have been a cruel interjection since the animal would undoubtedly have starved to death. Below: photos from Daily Mail website



In more cheerful news, Mark and the crew landed the guests ashore at Loch Drumbuie this morning. They walked out to Auliston Point before returning to the boat. Ken, who had organised this week's private charter, took Seven walking with him. A bit later Mark went for a run and caught up with the guests. Seven (aka Fatty!) surprised everyone by joining Mark for the last quarter mile run! Lunch was taken aboard after which the anchor was lifted with Hjalmar Bjorge departing the loch for this evening's overnight anchorage, Soriby Bay in Loch Tuath on the west coast of Mull. Below (left) Tim takes Ken and fellow passengers (plus Seven) ashore (right) Fatty and guests admiring the views

